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New program makes library books available in jury rooms

By Chad Halcom
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Got a summons for jury duty?

Well, before you consider throwing the book at a defendant, you can pick one up first for reading material while you wait, under a new county program offering a selection of local library books to prospective jurors at the courthouse.

Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh and Mount Clemens Public Library Director Donald Worrell launched a joint program this week that makes books and magazines from the county-wide library system available in the jury room, where county residents await possible selection to a jury after they've been summoned.

"The magazines we had, they get a bit tattered and you can really go through a magazine quickly when you're waiting so long," Sabaugh said. "And it's a chance for you to catch up on some of the reading you might be hoping to do sometime."

The jury room on the fifth floor of the county Circuit Court building offers a selection of magazines plus a television

and outlets for laptop computers and Internet connections. But, Sabaugh and Worrell said, people on juries often don't have a portable computer or don't want to watch the same TV program as everyone else.

"You can only watch so much daytime TV programming while you're waiting so long," Worrell said. "I think this is wonderful. It's putting another option in place for the people in the jury room and it's a great opportunity to promote reading."

The juror book program will include sending out notices along with a jury summons that describes the program and lists a Web site heading residents can use to review the library selection and make special book requests. If the book isn't in the standing collection of 100 books or so offered for jurors, Worrell and Sabaugh said, jurors can request a book or books in advance and have it waiting the day they arrive for jury duty. An inventory of books from libraries countywide is available for selection.

The selection is varied, with some fic-

tion and nonfiction, but officials said they will rotate some books regularly as newer books come in or as demand increases for certain literature.

Persons receiving jury duty summons typically report to the fifth-floor jury room on a set date in the morning. There, after a brief orientation and preparation with one of the court judges, the jury pool of 150 to 200 people waits — sometimes hours or even days — while the courts work through their dockets of cases and determine which ones must go to trial.

When a case is ready, the judge sends for a pool of potential jurors to come to that courtroom for jury selection with the parties and their lawyers. But the wait can be long and tiresome, officials said, and the new program could help pass the time pleasantly while promoting interest in reading and the county's libraries.

The book request and selection is available on the Web at www.macomb-countymi.gov/clerksoffice/BookRequest.asp.